

Holiday Fire Safety Kit 2007

Alberta Emergency
Management Agency



Alberta

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**Message from the Managing Director
Alberta Emergency Management Agency**

November 2007

The holiday season is approaching—a time to relax, unwind, and enjoy the festivities with family and friends. Please include safety as part of your holiday season activities, to stay safe at home, at work or on the road.

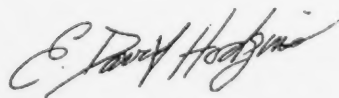
Statistics show there is an increased risk of fire during the holidays. Everyone can practice fire safety this holiday season by being aware of fire hazards and knowing how to prevent them from turning in to fire incidents. Having working smoke alarms and a fire escape plan that is practiced at least twice a year can also help save lives and protect property.

This campaign kit from the Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) provides holiday fire safety tips, and I hope these will help you to have a very enjoyable and fire-free holiday season.

For more information on fire safety, visit the AEMA website at www.aema.alberta.ca, or phone 780-427-8392 (toll-free in Alberta at 310-0000).

Best wishes for a fire-safe holiday season!

Sincerely,



E. David Hodgins
Managing Director
Alberta Emergency Management Agency



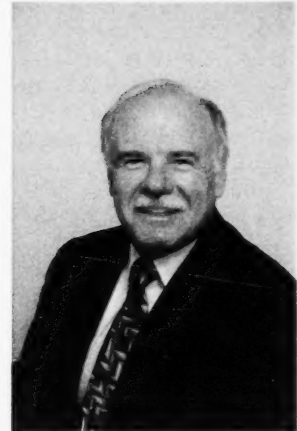
Alberta - A Province Prepared

Message from the Fire Commissioner Alberta Emergency Management Agency

November 2007

This campaign kit's purpose is to raise public awareness of the increased fire risk during the holiday season.

Many people believe most holiday season fires are caused by Christmas trees. However, fire statistics show that cooking, smoking, arson, home-heating equipment, electrical equipment, and candles are the most common causes of fires during the festive season.



I encourage each and every Albertan to practice fire safety during the upcoming holidays. Unfortunately, fire safety can take a lower priority due to our hectic schedules, visitors, children home from school holidays, extra cooking, parties and consumption of alcohol and cigarettes. It is during moments of forgetfulness, carelessness or hurry that fire hazards can turn into destructive fires.

Please take care during the holidays to prevent fires and to ensure that smoke alarms are in working condition. Make sure you test all the alarms in your home and replace batteries as needed. Of course, you must also have and practice a fire escape plan for your family, so everyone knows how to get out safely during a real fire emergency.

Yours in fire safety,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, which appears to read "Rick McCullough". The signature is stylized with a large, looping "R" and a long, sweeping underline.

Rick McCullough
Fire Commissioner

Taking Personal Responsibility to Prevent Home Fires during the Holidays

Every week, we hear about fires that have destroyed property, hurt someone or even taken a life. But, for many, fires aren't personal until one hits close to home. That's exactly what happened to those in the nearly 8,000 homes across Alberta that reported fires between 2001 and 2006.

Fire *is* personal, and everyone has a personal responsibility to not only prevent fires, but to also be prepared to escape if a fire occurs.

The upcoming holiday season is a time for social gatherings, partying and celebrating. But few people realize that these same activities can also lead to tragic fires in homes or community venues.

With the combination of our hectic lives, busy schedules, increased (and potentially hazardous) activities such as home heating, cooking, electrical lighting and burning candles, plus increases in drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes, it is no surprise there are more fires and related deaths, injuries and property losses in Alberta homes during the winter holiday season than any other time of year.

The loss of a home, a fire injury or death is no way to celebrate the holidays, and it's everyone's responsibility to take fire prevention and safety seriously.

Take a few moments to review the fire prevention and safety guidelines provided in the Holiday Fire Safety Campaign Kit prepared by the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. It is posted at www.aema.alberta.ca, or phone 780-427-8392 (toll-free in Alberta at 310-0000) to obtain a free copy by mail. What could be more personal than having tragedy strike in the place where many people feel the safest—their home? Being vigilant about fire prevention and safety is important in all areas of life, but being mindful of these issues in the home, especially during the holiday season, is essential.

Early warning of a fire is the first step in being able to escape from one. Install and maintain smoke alarms, and test them once a month. Having and practicing a home fire-escape plan is extremely important; if a fire occurs, you may have only two minutes to escape. Your escape plan could save precious moments and help you and your family get out alive.

Fires can happen to anyone, at anytime. The next time you hear about a fire, let it serve as a personal reminder that fires can be preventable, and being prepared to escape can mean the difference between life and death. Fire—it is personal.

Holiday Fires – statistics and background information

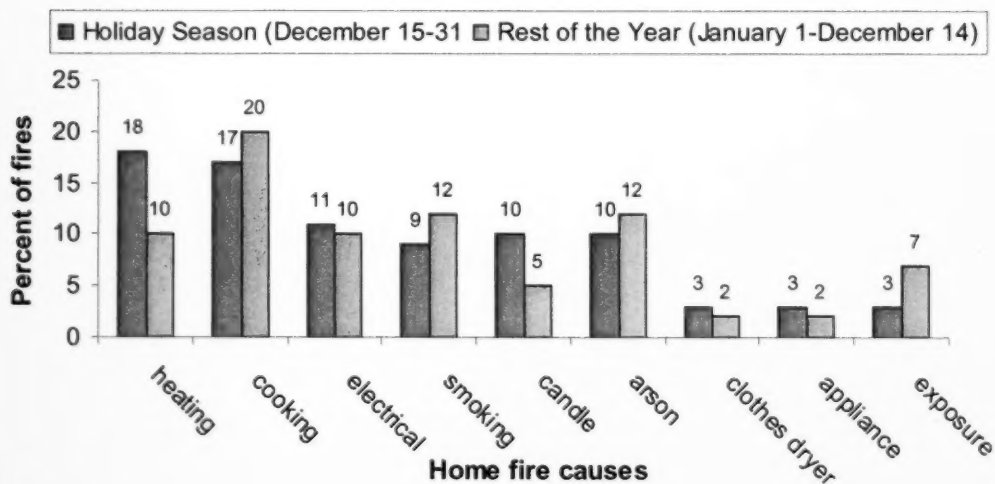
From December 15-31, the height of the holiday season, the number of fires, deaths, injuries, and property losses increases compared to the rest of the year as shown here:

Fires: up 18 per cent
Fire Deaths: up 25 per cent
Fire injuries: up 24 per cent
Property losses: up seven per cent

Many home fire incidents during this time of year can be the result of holiday activities like cooking, decorating, home heating, social gatherings, burning candles, and consuming alcohol and cigarettes. When these increased activities are coupled with our busy schedules, children at home for the holidays, visitors, and the many distractions that occur in most households, we may pay less attention to fire hazards and as a result, increase the risk of fire.

The chart below compares fire causes during the holiday season and the rest of the year. The results indicate that home heating, cooking, electrical hazards, smoking and candles contribute to most fires during the holiday season.

Fire Causes: December holidays vs, the rest of the year



Please follow the fire safety tips in this kit to help prevent fires and have a safe and enjoyable holiday season.

Home Fire Safety Tips for the Holidays

The Kitchen

Cooking is the number one cause of home fires in Alberta, and cooking oil and fat fires account for many of these. Be extra careful when doing this kind of cooking. The best way to fry foods is to use an electric, temperature-controlled skillet or a deep-fat fryer. Here's what to do if cooking oil or fat in a pot or pan catches fire:



- Turn the heat off immediately.
- Smother the flames by covering the pan with a lid.
- Use baking soda (flour can be explosive) on shallow grease fires.
- Never turn on the overhead fan, as this could spread the fire.
- Never throw water on a grease fire, as an explosive fire-ball could fill the kitchen.

A stovetop fire can start in a flash, so stay in the kitchen when something is cooking on the stove. Keep all combustible items a safe distance from the stove, including tea towels, wooden or plastic spoons, and paper towels.

Smoking

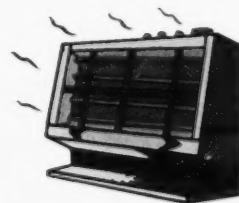
Fires caused by smoking can be deadly. Even if you don't smoke, some of your visitors might. To prevent smoking fires:

- Encourage smokers to go outside. Discourage smokers from discarding cigarette butts in planters, pots or dry leaves in the yard.
- Keep large, deep ashtrays on hand that will reduce the risk of ashes and cigarette butts falling onto rugs or upholstery.
- Allow ashes to cool completely before disposing of them.
- After parties, check around and under sofa and chair cushions for smouldering cigarettes.

Space Heaters

We often use space heaters to supplement the central heating system in our homes. To prevent heating fires:

- Keep space heaters at least one metre from anything that can burn, such as paper, bedding, furniture and curtains.
- Turn off all space heaters before going to bed or going out.



Fireplaces

- Never put gift wrap, boxes, cartons, or other types of packing in the fireplace. They burn too rapidly and generate too much heat.
- Don't hang Christmas stockings from the mantel when the fireplace is in use.
- Always use a screen in front of the fireplace to protect against flying sparks.
- Never use gasoline or any other flammable liquid to start a fire.
- Use only seasoned and dried wood.
- Never leave the fire unattended or let it smoulder.
- Clean out the ashes regularly. Place the ashes in a metal container and store outside, away from flammable materials.
- Don't use Christmas trees for firewood.



Candles

- Keep candles away from anything that could catch fire.
- Use non-combustible containers, and use tea lights or votive candles as they are generally a safer choice than tapers.
- Always have responsible, adult supervision of burning candles. Never leave burning candles unattended.
- Keep candles in sturdy holders on a stable surface, so they will not be knocked down. Keep them well away from drafts, curtains, children and pets.
- Extinguish all candles before leaving the room or going to sleep. Never leave the house with candles burning.
- Never put lit candles on a tree.



Electrical Outlets

- Never overload wall outlets. This practice is especially common during the holiday season, and it is not safe even for a short time.
- Inspect all cords before using them, and discard all defective cords.
 - Make sure cords are CSA certified.
 - Look for loose connections or frayed or exposed wire.
 - Read the labels and manufacturer's instructions to ensure proper use.
- Insert plugs fully into outlets. Poor contact may cause overheating or shock.
- Do not coil or bunch extension cords which are in use, and do not run them under carpets or rugs. This can cause a cord to overheat.
- Never use indoor extension cords outside.
- Keep outdoor electrical connectors above ground and out of puddles and snow.
- Be careful not to pinch cords when placing them behind or beneath furniture—they can fray and short.

Christmas Trees

Special fire safety precautions need to be taken when you have a live tree. A burning tree can rapidly fill a room with fire and deadly gases.



- Get a freshly cut tree. It will stay green longer and be less of a fire hazard. Pick one with strong green colour and noticeable fragrance.
- Always test for freshness before buying: trees with high moisture content are safer.
 - Few needles should fall when the tree is tapped on the ground
 - Needles should bend, not break, and the trunk should be sticky to the touch with resin.
- Cut the tree stem two to four centimetres diagonally to help absorb water.
 - Use a stand that holds two to three litres of water.
 - Make sure the tree is always immersed in water, or the stem may reseal itself and require a fresh cut. Check the water level every day.
 - Clean the tree stand to improve the tree's water intake; use one capful of bleach to a cup of water.
 - Use a tree stand that has widespread legs for better balance.
- Typically, tree fires start because of shorts in electrical lights or open flames from candles, lighters or matches. Never go near a Christmas tree with an open flame.
- Well-watered trees are usually not hazards, while dry, neglected trees can be.
- Place your tree away from heat sources such as fireplaces, TVs, sunny windows or heat vents. The heat dries out the tree, causing it to be more easily ignited by heat, flame or sparks.
- The tree should not block doors or windows.
- Never use lighted candles on a tree.
- A live tree can be used for two weeks. After that much time in a heated building, even the freshest tree can start to dry out.
- When the tree becomes dry, discard it promptly. The best way to dispose of your tree is by taking it to a recycling centre or having it taken away by a community pick-up service.
- Never put tree branches or needles in a fireplace or wood-burning stove.
- Consider an artificial tree—they are much safer and cleaner. If you are using a metallic or artificial tree, make sure it is flame retardant.

Decorations

- Choose decorations that are flame-retardant, non-combustible and non-conductive.
- If you have young children or pets, avoid very small decorations.
- Avoid using angel hair (glass wool) together with spray-on snowflakes. This combination is highly combustible.
- Do not use metallic ornaments on the tree. If they make contact with defective wiring, they could become a shock hazard.
- Recycle wrapping paper and never put wrapping paper in a fireplace. The intense heat can be hazardous.



Lights - Holiday Strings and Sets

- Use approved light sets that bear an approval marking authorized by the certification organization and is recognized by the Province of Alberta such as CSA, cUL, ULC, etc.
- Use the proper lights for the environment. Indoor lights should not be used outdoors because they lack weatherproof connections. Use outdoor lights only outside your home, as they can burn too hot indoors.
- Inspect lights before you use them. Check for cracked bulbs and for frayed, broken or exposed wires, and discard the string if faulty.
- Do not use electric lights on metallic trees. A faulty system could energize the tree and shock or electrocute anyone who comes into contact. Instead, use coloured floodlights placed a safe distance from the tree and out of reach.
- Link a maximum of three light strands, unless the directions indicate it is safe to do otherwise. Connect strings of lights to the extension cord before plugging the cord into the outlet. Make sure to periodically check the wires - they should not be warm to the touch.
- Before replacing a bulb, check the original package for the proper wattage and voltage.
- Make sure outdoor circuits are equipped with an approved, weather-proof ground fault circuit interrupter.
- Ensure circuit breakers and fuses on your holiday light circuits are no larger than 15 amperes.
- Don't overload circuits: have no more than 1400 watts on a circuit.
 - If other lights in the house dim when the holiday lighting is turned on, or the plug is very hot when unplugged, your circuit is overloaded.
 - To figure out a circuit's load, multiply the number of bulbs by the watts per bulb, plus any lamps, appliances or other equipment on the same circuit.
- LED (light-emitting diode) strings are available for sale through many Canadian retailers. These energy-efficient light strings produce very little heat, reducing the risk of fire. LED lights should have an approval label attached to the light string such as a red tag stating an approval file number. However, like any other electrical device, there is the potential for shock or fire hazard.
- Turn off all tree and display lights before going to bed or leaving the house.

Social Gatherings

Parties are common during the holiday season. While most parties are enjoyable social occasions, drinking alcohol combined with cooking, smoking or unattended candles can create a serious fire risk. To minimize the risk of fires before, during or after parties:

- Plan your event in advance, and allow enough time to prepare the meal. Hurried cooking activities, multi-tasking and neglecting fire safety can be ingredients for an unwanted house fire.
- Avoid overcrowding. The more people attending the party, the easier it is to lose control of the situation.
- Encourage guests to smoke outside. Consider putting up *no smoking* signs that direct guests to an outside smoking area.
- Refrain from burning candles during parties. They can easily be knocked over or light nearby combustible items unnoticed.

Smoke Alarms and Fire Escape Planning

Smoke alarms provide early warning of smoke and fire danger for safe escape from life-threatening fire emergencies. However, a number of conditions must be in place for smoke alarms to play their life-saving role:



- Smoke alarms must have a source of electricity, either from household current or from batteries. Never remove batteries for other uses or to stop false alarms.
- Smoke alarms are electronic devices that can fail with age. To make sure the alarm still functions, test each alarm every month by pushing the test button.
- At least one smoke alarm must be installed on every level of your home, outside each sleeping area. Most fire deaths happen during sleeping hours, and smoke alarms outside the bedrooms can alert you to escape if a smoke or fire condition occurs while you are asleep.

When the smoke alarm sounds, everyone must know what to do and where to go. Develop and practice a fire escape plan, keeping the following in mind:

- Know two ways out of every room, if possible. The first way out would be the door, while the alternate escape could be a window that can be exited safely.
- Make sure all designated escape routes are accessible and free of clutter.
- Leave the building as quickly as possible. Once outside, don't re-enter the building for any reason.
- Call 9-1-1 from outside the building using a cell phone or neighbour's phone.

Fire Safety During Power Outages

Fire safety can be a concern during power outages, often due to improper use of candles and generators. Follow these tips to ensure safety while power is restored:

- Use battery-powered flashlights or lanterns. This will greatly reduce your risk of a home fire while you are without power. Using candles for emergency lighting can be hazardous. Many fires have started from safety lapses while using candles.
- Many homeowners have smoke alarms powered by household electricity. During power outages, make sure you have a working battery-powered smoke alarm. Smoke alarms give your family that critical early warning to escape a home fire.
- If you are using a generator as a backup power source, always place the generator outside. If the generator is inside your home, fatal levels of carbon monoxide exhaust can accumulate and endanger your family.

Fire Safety Gift Suggestions

- Home smoke alarm
- Carbon monoxide detector
- Multi-purpose (ABC) fire extinguisher
- Candle snuffer
- Thermostatically controlled deep fryer
- A second floor escape ladder
- A first-aid kit
- A flashlight and batteries
- "Emergency kit" including energy bars, water, battery radio, flashlight and a first-aid kit packed in a small travel bag.



Watch out for Fake Safety Labels when Shopping!

When you go shopping this holiday season, beware of products carrying fake safety labels. More and more products are turning up with fake safety certification markings, putting consumers at risk of buying something that may not be up to Canadian safety standards. Untested and uncertified products can pose a serious safety risk.

Recognized standards organizations such as Canadian Standards Association (CSA) or Underwriter's Laboratories of Canada (ULC, cUL) authorize manufacturers to use their approval or certification mark on products that have been tested to meet applicable standards for safety or performance.

In recent years, authorities have turned up a growing inventory of potentially dangerous products bearing fake safety labels, including light strings, fans, extension cords, lamps, and light fixtures. Electrical products that don't bear legitimate marks from a recognized standards certification agency may be unsafe, and they can pose serious electrical shock and/or fire hazards.

Here are some suggestions to safeguard against buying counterfeit products:

- Examine the quality of the labels. They shouldn't be blurred, torn, or sloppily stamped on the product.
- Peculiar grammar, misspellings and altered product names might indicate that the product/safety label is counterfeit.
- Look for company information on the product packaging—for example, the company's name, mailing address, website, or toll-free number. If there's no contact information, the product/label is likely counterfeit.
- Look for product UPC codes and trademarks—if they're missing, you may be dealing with a counterfeit product.
- Buy brands you know and trust by reputable manufacturers.
- Be cautious of Internet purchases—make sure you understand what you are getting, and what you are not (e.g., check country of origin and distributor, installation and performance data, maintenance and troubleshooting information, warranty and access to service).
- Be skeptical if a price is too good to be true—it could be. Be very suspicious if you are asked to pay cash only, or you can't get a receipt. Check for the brand name—if there is none or it's an unknown name or logo, you may want to investigate further before buying.
- Visit the websites of standards organizations (e.g. CSA, ULC) to check legitimate approval online (look for product directories or something similar, and follow the prompts) or for information on product recalls and warnings.
- Report suspicions right away—to the appropriate standards organization, the retailer or the supplier.

Fire Prevention Tip Sheets

Fire safety tip sheets are posted on the Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) website at www.aema.alberta.ca:

- Select the top tab labelled *Public Education & Awareness*
- On the left-hand side of the page, select *Safety/Fact Tip Sheets*

Online Features and Advertisements

Features available on the website include a **Christmas tree fire video** (from the National Institute of Standards and Technology), downloadable broadcast-quality **public service announcements for radio stations** from the *Idea Bank*, and a **Turkey Fryer video clip**.

To find the features:

- Go to www.aema.alberta.ca
- Select the top tab labelled Public Education & Awareness
- On the left-hand side of the page, select Campaigns
- On the left-hand side of the page, select Holiday Season Fire Safety

Coop Advertisements

Holiday fire safety advertisements for newspapers/newsletters:

The Holiday Season is a time of high fire risk

- * Fires, injuries, deaths and property losses increase significantly during the holidays.

- * Heating, candles, cooking, and smoking cause the majority of fires during the holiday season.

- * Practice fire safety in all of your holiday season activities.



SPONSOR NAME

Keep Your Holidays Safe 'tis the season for heating

- * Fireplaces, wood stoves, space heaters and furnaces are a major cause of fires during the holiday season.

- * Keep all combustibles at least one metre (three feet.) away from heating sources.

- * Have your woodstove, fireplace, and furnace checked by a professional prior to the heating season.



SPONSOR NAME

Holiday Candles add to fire risk

- * The average number of candle fires increase during the holiday season.

- * Keep lit candles away from items that can catch fire such as toys, clothing, books, curtains Christmas trees and paper decorations.

- * Never leave children or pets alone in a room with lit candles.



SPONSOR NAME